



DPR Korea: UN agencies begin emergency operations to feed 3.5 million people



Women and children in the DPRK to be focus of a UN operation to feed an estimated 3.5 million people

29 April 2011 – The United Nations World Food Programme (**WFP**) and the UN Children’s Fund (**UNICEF**) today announced plans to introduce emergency operations in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) to feed an estimated 3.5 million people in desperate need after crop losses and a particularly bitter winter.

Women and children will be the focus of the one-year WFP operation, which follows an assessment by several aid agencies of food security inside the DPRK, according to a **press release** issued by the agency. The operation is expected to cost just over \$200 million.

UNICEF has launched a \$20 million appeal to fund assistance programmes in the five DPRK provinces with the highest rates of malnutrition and in other counties with similar problems.

Although WFP said overall rates of acute malnutrition have not yet reached crisis levels, it warned that the situation could deteriorate rapidly if there is any further reduction in the food intake of those in need.

Many families have already resorted to cutting out the size or number of meals each day, and Government-supplied rations provide only about half of a person’s daily food needs.

“We face a critical window to get supplies into the country and reach the millions who are already hungry,” said Amir Abdulla, WFP’s Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer.

“Our primary concern is for those who are most vulnerable to shocks in the food supply – children, mothers, the elderly and large families.”

WFP spokesperson Emilia Casella told reporters in Geneva that the assessment found that the severe winter this year had damaged a large proportion of the seed potato stocks needed to plant the next crop.

The vegetable harvest late last year was also down 44 per cent on the expected volume, she said.

Under the operation WFP will provide cereals and the ingredients for the local production of such foods as corn-soy milk, rice-milk blend and high-nutrient biscuits through a public distribution system.

International staff working for the agency will make more than 400 visits each month to provincial markets and distribution points during the operation, and will only have to give 24 hours' notice to local authorities.

The operation will continue through the harvest expected in October, with specialized nutritious products expected to be distributed then. WFP aims to procure food from neighbouring countries so that it can be distributed as fast as possible.

"WFP has worked in the DPRK for 15 years and we will be drawing on all that experience and expertise to ensure this operation provides vital, timely food and nutrition to those who cannot support themselves through these difficult months," Mr. Abdulla noted.

UNICEF's assistance programme will tackle behavioural and structural issues, such as hygiene, infant feeding practices, water and sanitation, as well as direct nutritional needs, agency spokesperson Marixie Mercado said.

Its operation will target more than 400,000 young children and an estimated 165,000 pregnant or lactating women, regarded as among the most vulnerable groups in the current crisis.

Ms. Mercado said the programme will also aim to help children living permanently in institutions as they do not have extended families from which to draw support.

A survey carried out in 2009 found that 32 per cent of DPRK children were stunted, with even higher rates in some rural areas.

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